

PROPOSAL EVALUATION

Integrated Regional Water Management Implementation Proposition 50, Chapter 8 IRWM Implementation Step 1

PIN: 6136
APPLICANT NAME: Salton Sea Authority
PROJECT TITLE: IRWM for Salton Sea: Water Quality Improvement of Inflows
FUNDS REQUESTED: \$20,080,000
COST MATCH: \$ 3,500,000
TOTAL PROJECT COST: \$23,580,000

DESCRIPTION: The goal of the integrated water management plan for the Salton Sea is to improve water quality and habitat in the Salton Basin. The plan has two main components: 1) Improve the quality of the inflowing water in the lake's three primary tributaries, the Alamo, New and Whitewater Rivers; and 2) Reduce salinity and stabilize the elevation of the lake by constructing dikes to create an outlet for brine disposal in an isolated area. This grant will provide partial funding for the first component of this plan. The project will involve designing and constructing four new wetlands on the Alamo River, two on the New River and one on the Whitewater River. The wetlands are designed to reduce silt load and remove nutrients and other constituents from the inflow waters that sustains the Salton Sea, a salt water lake with a marine fishery that provides an important food source for birds migrating along the Pacific Flyway. The Salton Sea is California's largest lake.

Question: Consistency with Minimum IRWM Standards - This evaluation will focus on whether the applicant has demonstrated that the IRWM Plan meets the minimum standards.

Pass

Question: Consistency with IRWM Standards - Adopted IRWM Plan and Proof of Formal Adoption. Weighting factor is 1. 2

The applicant states an IRWMP is under development and presents a schedule showing IRWMP finalization and adoption by January 1, 2007. The applicant submits a 150-page report titled "Salton Sea Restoration, Final Preferred Project Report" and states it is essentially a FED for an IRWMP. Applicant also states work has continued and will continue to further develop into an IRWMP. Somewhat conflicting statements provided in different parts of the application so it unclear whether the applicant is submitting an FED or a draft IRWMP.

Question: Consistency with IRWM Standards - Description of Region. Weighting factor is 1. 4

The region is described as the Salton Sea Basin, in Riverside & Imperial Counties. The Salton Sea Authority (the applicant) is composed of five entities including two counties, an irrigation district & a water district. Several maps are included in the proposal, but none of them shows all the boundaries of the member agencies of the applicant. The proposal does discuss briefly regional issues such as agricultural runoff, sea salinity & ecosystem. Regional water supply & management discussed including the effect of the Quantification Settlement Agreement (QSA) & the resulting reduction to inflows. The regional socio-cultural makeup is not described.

Question: Consistency with IRWM Standards - Objectives. Weighting factor is 1. 3

Although restoration of the Salton Sea is a high priority in the region, to have a truly integrated regional water management plan the applicant should identify any other regional water related problems or conflicts and set objectives to address them, or explain how they can be addressed through implementation of the IRWMP.

Question: Consistency with IRWM Standards - Water Management Strategies and Integration. Weighting factor is 1. 2

The applicant has listed several water management strategies but has not discussed/considered the following water management strategies: groundwater management, water supply reliability & flood management. There is minimal description of the various strategies & how they integrate and work together. Attachment 5 provides summary of information that will be provided in the IRWMP when it is ready.

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Question: Consistency with IRWM Standards - Priorities and Schedule. Weighting factor is 1.

3

The short term priorities are stated as construction of the wetlands in the tributary rivers. Other regional water issues the applicant should consider when setting regional priorities are: reducing the amount of raw sewage in the New River, reducing the amounts of nutrients that flow into the Salton Sea, and reducing the amount of trash in the New and Alamo River. There is little to no discussion of how decision-making will respond to regional changes, or how responses to implementation of the project will be assessed and acted upon.

Question: Consistency with IRWM Standards - Implementation. Weighting factor is 1.

3

The FED, which is not a complete IRWMP at this time, discusses the establishment of committees to facilitate implementation. What is unclear is who the responsible party will be once construction is completed. Who will handle the day-to-day operations of the constructed wetlands, shallow water habitat, and causeway. In order to facilitate the plan implementation, the applicant has formed a Technical Advisory Committee Public Finance Committee, and a Public Policy & Planning Committee. Information is included in attachment 5, but does not refer to where in the plan this information is provided.

Question: Consistency with IRWM Standards - Impacts and Regional Benefits. Weighting factor is 1.

4

Alternatives in the FED, which is not a complete IRWMP at this time, include impacts and regional benefits. Most evaluations are focused on the Salton Sea but do include other impacts.

Question: Consistency with IRWM Standards - Technical Analysis and Plan Performance. Weighting factor is 1.

3

The FED details the various technical aspects of the restoration study (ecological, water quality, engineering, and geotechnical). The proposal also discusses evaluation of sea salinity & inflows. Analyses of data on sea water surface & quality is included. There is a chapter that deals with an overview of the Salton Sea Accounting Model that attempts to predict the hydrologic response of the sea to changing conditions. There is no discussion of how to deal with data gaps. More detail of techniques and methods of data analysis should be included. The plan lacks details on how to assess plan performance, and how the plan will be adjusted based on performance data.

Question: Consistency with IRWM Standards - Data Management. Weighting factor is 1.

2

The FED does not provide details about management of data generated during plan development and implementation. The applicant also does not describe data collection methods that will be employed to illustrate overall project success. To monitor project success, the applicant has allotted some time in the project schedule for increased monitoring before construction begins and a calendar quarter after construction of each wetland is completed. There is no discussion of how data will be managed and disseminated to the public, how the data collected will satisfy statewide data needs, or how the data will be integrated with ambient monitoring program needs.

Question: Consistency with IRWM Standards - Financing. Weighting factor is 1.

3

The FED identifies potential financing sources (Prop 50, QSA legislation generated funds, local tax increment etc.) The applicant anticipates that proposed program implementation will lead to increased property values allowing local government to capture more revenue to support project implementation. The applicant does not discuss financing of long term operations and maintenance.

Question: Consistency with IRWM Standards - Relation to Local Planning & Sustainability. Weighting factor is 1.

2

The Salton Sea Authority is working with its member agencies, including the planning departments of Imperial and Riverside Counties to coordinate planning activities; but the application does not sufficiently describe how the preferred program options relate to local planning by its member agencies. The final IRWMP will describe the relationship between the projects and local plans and policies. This information is not currently included.

Question: Consistency with IRWM Standards - Stakeholder Involvement & Coordination. Weighting factor is 1.

2

Stakeholder involvement is briefly discussed in Attachment 5 but not in FED. The applicant identifies 19 local stakeholders in addition to five state and four federal stakeholders that will participate. Outreach and environmental justice concerns are not described in detail. The applicant's list of stakeholders does not include local cities and agencies working on the New River Improvement; though some of their Salton Sea Watershed Initiative partners are included.

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Question: Funding Match. This evaluation will focus on whether the applicant has demonstrated the ability to meet the minimum funding match or has requested a waiver or reduction in the funding match. Pass or Fail.

Pass

Question: Description of Proposal. Weighting factor is 3.

12

The proposal includes detailed description of the proposed projects. However, it lacks details for a continuous monitoring program to assess the effectiveness of the proposed wetland projects. It is not clear who will handle the day-to-day operation and management. Most questions discussed in Attachment 6, but were not addressed in the FED. Goals and Scientific basis are adequately discussed in the FED or draft IRWMP.

Question: Project Prioritization. Weighting factor is 2.

8

The proposal provides the top three priorities among the seven proposed projects, which are presented in Attachment 6. This prioritization is consistent with the scheduling of the preferred restoration option of the plan (Salton Sea Restoration Program - phase 1: Begin Wetlands). The wetlands projects are not the highest priority projects in the FED/draft IRWMP, but the plan is a logical first step in the overall restoration plan for the Salton Sea, by improving the quality of the inflowing water in the lake's three primary tributaries, the New, Alamo and Whitewater Rivers. Applicant states all the seven proposed projects are equally important to the integrated plan for the Salton Sea basin and for implementation convenience are prioritized in construction order. The maximum score was not given because the proposed projects were discussed in the application attachment and not what is in the submitted FED/draft IRWMP.

Question: Cost Estimate. Weighting factor is 1.

5

Costs are well presented and reasonable, though some may need to be justified or adjusted. The applicant has provided cost breakdown for each of the identified projects.

Question: Schedule. Weighting factor is 1.

4

The proposed end date of 2009 for completion of projects overlaps with other phases of the project. There is no discussion of whether or not this could be a problem and how it would be resolved.

Question: Need. Weighting factor is 2.

6

The proposal demonstrates there is a critical need for the restoration of the Salton Sea and improvement of water quality in its tributaries. The IRWMP has two main components (1) improve the quality of the inflowing water in the lake's three primary tributaries, the New, Alamo and Whitewater Rivers, and (2) reduce salinity and stabilize lake elevation by construction dikes to create an outlet for brine disposal in an isolated area. The applicant is requesting IRWM funds for partial funding of the first component, water quality improvement in the rivers. No substantive discussion of the need for this project or the negative impact if it is not completed. Local, regional, economic, environmental and fiscal impacts are not sufficiently addressed.

Question: Disadvantaged Communities. Weighting factor is 2.

6

The applicant has provided documentation supporting the presence of DAC in the region. But there is no discussion of how these communities would benefit directly from the proposed projects.

Question: Program Preferences. Weighting factor is 1.

3

The proposal meets directly three out of the six Program Preferences that are identified in the Guidelines. These preferences mainly relate to water quality & pollution reduction. This proposal does not have groundwater management aspects to it. Improvements to the local water supply quality and reliability are not covered. Safe drinking water is not covered either.

TOTAL SCORE: 77